



Network Neutrality, Universal Broadband, and Racial Justice

What is Net Neutrality?

Net Neutrality ensures that Internet users can access any website, service, or application of their choice without interference or discrimination by the Internet Service Provider (“ISP”). This means that once a consumer buys an Internet service connection, he or she can choose to access any lawful content without fear that the ISP will block or impair access to it. Net Neutrality prevents ISPs from censoring content for any reason or giving preferential treatment to any specific website, service, or application based merely on its content, message, or ownership. This non-discrimination concept has been the guiding principle for the Internet since its inception, and at one time was the law.

Why is Net Neutrality a civil rights issue?

The Internet has the potential to increase equity in media access and political participation for historically marginalized communities. Due to high barriers to entry in television, radio, and cable, traditional media outlets have not included enough diverse voices, or provided content that is significant and relevant to underrepresented groups. With lower barriers to entry, the Internet can create a platform where these groups can speak for themselves and on behalf of their communities, to wider audiences. Neutral networks grant equal opportunity to every idea and can help ensure that communities of color do not experience the same lack of representation they have in other media platforms.

How does Net Neutrality help communities of color?

Net Neutrality is community-based and people-centered policy.

Neutral networks lead to more empowered communities. Rather than focus on corporate service providers, Internet policy should address the human impact: the opportunity for all people—regardless of their digital skills, or geographic and socio-economic situation—to create, access, and share information useful for their own life plans. Net Neutrality is rooted in fairness, equality, and freedom, and can support the creation of digitally empowered communities of color.

Net Neutrality can help drive adoption and innovation.

Studies suggest that home adoption rates for broadband Internet service are low among communities of color. However, the accessibility and availability of more relevant content could help underscore the importance of the Internet. Net Neutrality will ensure that the Internet remains a platform for innovation, equality, connection, and community, and as a result a valued space for economic growth and democratic engagement in communities of color.

Net Neutrality can help close the digital divide.

When fairness is the rule, ISPs invest more. Publicly available data indicates that investment by the telephone companies was actually higher and rose substantially during the time when ISPs were subject to Net Neutrality-like regulations stemming from the 1996 Telecommunications Act. Moreover, decisions on investment and deployment are not dictated simply by Net Neutrality regulations, but depend on factors such as demand and supply, costs, competition, and overall confidence in the economy.



What is Universal Broadband?

Universal Broadband refers to the effort to define broadband as a Title II service, which would extend several FCC public interest obligations to broadband and make broadband service eligible for Universal Service Fund (USF) support. Universal Service is a concept established in 1934 to make rapid, efficient, nation- and worldwide wire and radio communication available to all people in the United States at reasonable rates, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex. If the FCC declares broadband a Universal Service in the National Broadband Plan, it could:

- Promote the availability of quality broadband services at just, reasonable, and affordable rates, and increase access to quality broadband services throughout the nation—specifically to unserved and underserved communities.
- Open broadband up to full USF support and expand available resources, creating subsidies to consumers that alleviate pressure on their monthly bills *and* subsidies for companies seeking to build out networks to unserved and underserved areas.
- Require broadband to have neutral networks that are operated in an open and nondiscriminatory manner and provide reasonably symmetric service (this means that both download and upload capacity would be protected), treating consumers as active speakers, rather than passive listeners.

Why is Universal Broadband a civil rights issue?

The nearly 70-year commitment of Congress and the FCC to Universal Service has helped to deliver essential telecommunications services and connect rural areas, the poor, schools, libraries, and communities of color to jobs, education, services, and health care. It made the telephone an indispensable communication tool, and increased the value of the public network to all users. However, serious inequities still exist. Defining broadband as a public infrastructure and Universal Service will address these inequities, help foster economic growth and democratic engagement in the poorest communities, and increase their quality of life in immeasurable ways. Broadband access and deployment to poor communities, communities of color, and rural communities is essential to the public health and public safety of our nation.

How does defining broadband as a Universal Service help communities of color?

Broadband is a critical piece of national infrastructure, we must protect it.

As we move into the 21st century, all people—and especially communities of color—need an affordable, accessible and well-distributed national Internet backbone. As the numbers of people of color using the Internet, and its relevance in their lives, grows, it is imperative that this critical national infrastructure not be left to the whims of the market.

Universal Broadband helps build empowered, engaged, connected communities.

Though the numbers of people of color online are growing, a significant digital divide still exists. As a Universal Service, broadband access and deployment to poor communities, communities of color, and rural communities will improve educational and health outcomes, support local business, and increase democratic participation and good governance. Universal Broadband can expand our ability to build community, remain culturally connected, and advocate for change.

Universal Broadband will increase racial justice and economic equity.

Universal Broadband will help to close the digital—and the democracy—divide, and reduce existing economic and racial gaps. Government, business, and organizations have a responsibility to champion universal accessibility, challenge anti-competitive behavior, and address unmet community needs through increasing the access, quality, and relevance of broadband services.